PROTAGORAS

This is the dramatic masterpiece among Plato's 'Socratic' dialogues. It depicts Socrates debating the great sophist Protagoras, with Hippias and Prodicus, two other very famous sophists, in active attendance. An excited flock of students and admirers looks on. Plato gives us deep and sympathetic portraits of both his principal speakers—and neither comes off unscathed.

A sophist is an educator. Protagoras offers to teach young men 'sound deliberation' and the 'art of citizenship'—in other words, as Socrates puts it, human 'virtue', what makes someone an outstandingly good person. But can this really be taught? Is virtue—as it ought to be if it can *be taught—an expertise, a rationally based way of understanding, deliberating about and deciding things for the best? Socrates doubts that virtue can be taught at all, and all the more that Protagoras can teach it. Protagoras is committed to holding that it can be—by him—and he expounds an extremely attractive myth about the original establishment of human societies to show how there is room for him to do it. But he is also deeply cautious in the practice of his educator's art—almost his first words in the dialogue are a long oration on the importance to a sophist of caution as he offers himself publicly as the teacher of a city's youth. Can he then be bold enough to answer Socrates' questions about human virtue in such a way as to articulate an account that will sustain his claims to teach it? In the protracted dialectical exchange that follows, Protagoras distinguishes several virtues, all parts of that human virtue that he teaches, and insists, against Socrates' urging, that not all of these (in particular, not courage) are to be thought of as knowledge or wisdom. That, after all, is the popular view of the matter—so, in his caution, Protagoras sticks with that, or tries to, to the bitter end, resisting as long as he can Socrates' elaborate efforts to show that courage, too, like the rest of virtue, is nothing but wisdom. But if Protagoras is right, how can virtue in general, and courage in particular, be the sort of rationally based expertise that it has to be if it can be taught? It appears that Protagoras would have done better to follow his own convictions about virtue—that all of it is teachable—riding roughshod over popular opinion where necessary to show how all the parts of human virtue are wisdom or knowledge. In fact, Socrates shows himself to be much more an ally of Protagoras on the question of the nature of human virtue than at first appears. He is deeply committed, more deeply indeed than Protagoras, to Protagoras' initial claim that virtue is a rationally based expertise at deliberation and decision. But how, then, can he have been right to doubt whether virtue is teachable? Aren't all rationally based*

expertises acquired by teaching? (In reflecting on this question, readers will want to consult also the Meno.*)*

Thus both speakers get their comeuppance—Socrates for denying that virtue is teachable, Protagoras for denying that it is wisdom. The whole matter has to be rethought. At the end, we are sent back to the beginning, to go over the old ground once more, as Socrates himself has just done in retelling the events of the day to his unnamed friend and to us readers. One thing has been established, though—precisely what Socrates set out to discover in accompanying his friend Hippocrates to Callias' house to confront Protagoras: even if virtue can *be taught, no one should entrust himself to Protagoras to learn it, since he does not even have a coherent view of what it is.*

This Socrates, like that of Gorgias, *has more substantial theoretical commitments than the Socrates of other 'Socratic' dialogues. He does not limit himself to examining the opinions of others, but argues, as something he is committed to, however revisably, that all virtue is one, namely a single knowledge, that acting against one's own convictions—'weakness of will'—is impossible, and that our 'salvation in life' depends upon an 'art of measurement' that will overcome the power of appearance and get us to act rightly always. The dialogue invites us to ponder these theses, to work out for ourselves Socrates' reasons for holding to them—and to question whether he is right to do so.*

J.M.C.

FRIEND: Where have you just come from, Socrates? No, don't tell me. 309
It's pretty obvious that you've been hunting the ripe and ready Alcibiades.[1]
Well, I saw him just the other day, and he is certainly still a beautiful man—and just between the two of us, 'man' is the proper word, Socrates: his beard is already filling out.

SOCRATES: Well, what of it? I thought you were an admirer of Homer, b
who says that youth is most charming when the beard is first blooming[2]—which is just the stage Alcibiades is at.

FRIEND: So what's up? Were you just with him? And how is the young man disposed towards you?

SOCRATES: Pretty well, I think, especially today, since he rallied to my side and said a great many things to support me.[3] You're right, of course: I *was* just with him. But there's something really strange I want to tell you

Translated by Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell.

1. Alcibiades (c. 450–404 B.C.), Athenian general, noted in his youth for his beauty and intellectual promise. See his encomium of Socrates in *Symposium* 215a ff. for more details on their relationship, as Plato understood it.

2. *Iliad* xxiv.348; *Odyssey* x.279.

3. See below, 336b and 347b.

about. Although we were together, I didn't pay him any mind; in fact, I forgot all about him most of the time.

c FRIEND: How could anything like that have happened to the two of you? You surely haven't met someone else more beautiful, at least not in this city.

SOCRATES: Much more beautiful.

FRIEND: What are you saying? A citizen or a foreigner?

SOCRATES: A foreigner.

FRIEND: From where?

SOCRATES: Abdera.

FRIEND: And this foreigner seems to you more beautiful than the son of Clinias?

SOCRATES: How could superlative wisdom not seem surpassingly beautiful?

FRIEND: What! Have you been in the company of some wise man, Socrates?

d SOCRATES: The wisest man alive, if you think the wisest man is—Protagoras.

FRIEND: What are you saying? Is Protagoras in town?

SOCRATES: And has been for two days.

FRIEND: And you've just now come from being with him?

310 SOCRATES: That's right, and took part in quite a long conversation.

FRIEND: Well, sit right down, if you're free now, and tell us all about it. Let the boy make room for you here.

SOCRATES: By all means. I'd count it a favor if you'd listen.

FRIEND: And vice versa, if you'd tell us.

SOCRATES: That would make it a double favor then. Well, here's the story.

b This morning just before daybreak, while it was still dark, Hippocrates,[4] son of Apollodorus and Phason's brother, banged on my door with his stick, and when it was opened for him he barged right in and yelled in that voice of his, "Socrates, are you awake or asleep?"

Recognizing his voice, I said, "Is that Hippocrates? No bad news, I hope."

"Nothing but good news," he said.

"I'd like to hear it," I said. "What brings you here at such an hour?"

"Protagoras has arrived," he said, standing next to me.

"Day before yesterday," I said. "Did you just find out?"

c "Yes! Just last evening." As he said this he felt around for the bed and sat at my feet and continued: "That's right, late yesterday evening, after I got back from Oenoë. My slave Satyrus had run away from me. I meant to tell you that I was going after him, but something else came up and made me forget. After I got back and we had eaten dinner and were about to get some rest, *then* my brother tells me Protagoras has arrived. I was

d getting ready to come right over to see you even then, until I realized it was just too late at night. But as soon as I had slept some and wasn't dead-tired any more, I got up and came over here right away."

4. This Hippocrates is known to us only from this one dialogue.

Recognizing his fighting spirit and his excitement, I asked him: "So what's it to you? Has Protagoras done anything wrong to you?"

He laughed and said, "You bet he has, Socrates. He has a monopoly on wisdom and won't give me any."

"But look," I said, "if you meet his price he'll make you wise too."

"If only it were as simple as that," he said, "I'd bankrupt myself and e
my friends too. But that's why I'm coming to you, so you will talk to him for me. I'm too young myself, and besides, I've never even seen Protagoras or heard him speak. I was still just a child the last time he was in town. He's such a celebrity, Socrates, and everyone says he's a terribly clever 311
speaker. Why don't we walk over now, to be sure to catch him in? I've heard he's staying with Callias, son of Hipponicus. Come on, let's go."

"Let's not go there just yet," I said. "It's too early. Why don't we go out here into the courtyard and stroll around until it's light? Then we can go. Protagoras spends most of his time indoors, so don't worry; we're likely to catch him in."

So we got up and walked around the courtyard. I wanted to see what b
Hippocrates was made of, so I started to examine him with a few questions. "Tell me, Hippocrates," I said. "You're trying to get access to Protagoras, prepared to pay him a cash fee for his services to you. But what is he, and what do you expect to become? I mean, suppose you had your mind set on going to your namesake, Hippocrates of Cos, the famous physician, to c
pay him a fee for his services to you, and if someone asked you what this Hippocrates is that you were going to pay him, what would you say?"

"I would say a physician," he said.

"And what would you expect to become?"

"A physician."

"And if you had a mind to go to Polyclitus of Argos or Phidias of Athens to pay them a fee, and if somebody were to ask you what kind of professionals you had in mind paying, what would you say?"

"I would say sculptors."

"And what would you expect to become?"

"A sculptor, obviously."

"All right," I said. "Here we are, you and I, on our way to Protagoras, d
prepared to pay him cash as a fee on your behalf, spending our own money, and if that's not enough to persuade him, our friends' money as well. Suppose someone notices our enthusiasm and asks us: 'Tell me, Socrates and Hippocrates, what is your idea in paying Protagoras? What e
is he?' What would we say to him? What other name do we hear in reference to Protagoras? Phidias is called a sculptor and Homer a poet. What do we hear Protagoras called?"

"A sophist is what they call him, anyway, Socrates."

"Then it is as a sophist that we are going to pay him?"

"Yes."

"And if somebody asks you what you expect to become in going to 312
Protagoras?"

He blushed in response—there was just enough daylight now to show him up—and said, "If this is at all like the previous cases, then, obviously, to become a sophist."

"What? You? Wouldn't you be ashamed to present yourself to the Greek world as a sophist?"

"Yes, I would, Socrates, to be perfectly honest."

"Well, look, Hippocrates, maybe this isn't the sort of education you
b expect to get from Protagoras. Maybe you expect to get the kind of lessons you got from your grammar instructor or music teacher or wrestling coach. You didn't get from them technical instruction to become a professional, but a general education suitable for a gentleman."

"That's it exactly! That's just the sort of education you get from Protagoras."

"Then do you know what you are about to do now, or does it escape you?" I said.

"What do you mean?"

c "That you are about to hand over your soul for treatment to a man who is, as you say, a sophist. As to what exactly a sophist is, I would be surprised if you really knew. And yet, if you are ignorant of this, you don't know whether you are entrusting your soul to something good or bad."

"But I think I do know," he said.

"Then tell me what you think a sophist is."

"I think," he said, "that, as the name suggests, he is someone who has an understanding of wise things."

d "Well, you could say the same thing about painters and carpenters, that they understand wise things. But if someone asked us 'wise in what respect?' we would probably answer, for painters, 'wise as far as making images is concerned,' and so on for the other cases. And if someone asked, 'What about sophists? What wise things do they understand?'—what would we answer? What are they expert at making?"

"What else, Socrates, should we say a sophist is expert at than making people clever speakers?"

"Our answer would then be true, but not sufficient, for it requires another
e question: On what subject does the sophist make you a clever speaker? For example, a lyre-player makes you a clever speaker on his subject of expertise, the lyre. Right?"

"Yes."

"All right then. On what subject does a sophist make you a clever speaker?"

"It's clear that it's the same subject that he understands."

"Likely enough. And what is this subject that the sophist understands and makes his student understand?"

"By God," he said, "I really don't know what to say."

313 I went on to my next point: "Do you see what kind of danger you are about to put your soul in? If you had to entrust your body to someone

and risk its becoming healthy or ill, you would consider carefully whether you should entrust it or not, and you would confer with your family and friends for days on end. But when it comes to something you value more than your body, namely your soul, and when everything concerning b whether you do well or ill in your life depends on whether it becomes worthy or worthless, I don't see you getting together with your father or brother or a single one of your friends to consider whether or not to entrust your soul to this recently arrived foreigner. No, you hear about him in the evening—right?—and the next morning, here you are, not to talk about whether it's a good idea to entrust yourself to him or not, but ready to spend your own money and your friends' as well, as if you had thought it all through already and, no matter what, you had to be with Protagoras, c a man whom you admit you don't know and have never conversed with, and whom you call a sophist although you obviously have no idea what this sophist is to whom you are about to entrust yourself."

"I guess so, Socrates, from what you say."

"Am I right, then, Hippocrates, that a sophist is a kind of merchant who peddles provisions upon which the soul is nourished? That's what he seems like to me."

"But what is the soul nourished on, Socrates?"

"Teachings, I would say. And watch, or the sophist might deceive us d in advertising what he sells, the way merchants who market food for the body do. In general, those who market provisions don't know what is good or bad for the body—they just recommend everything they sell—nor do those who buy (unless one happens to be a trainer or doctor). In the same way, those who take their teachings from town to town and sell them wholesale or retail to anybody who wants them recommend all their products, but I wouldn't be surprised, my friend, if some of these people did not know which of their products are beneficial and which detrimental e to the soul. Likewise those who buy from them, unless one happens to be a physician of the soul. So if you are a knowledgeable consumer, you can buy teachings safely from Protagoras or anyone else. But if you're not, please don't risk what is most dear to you on a roll of the dice, for there 314 is a far greater risk in buying teachings than in buying food. When you buy food and drink from the merchant you can take each item back home from the store in its own container and before you ingest it into your body you can lay it all out and call in an expert for consultation as to what should be eaten or drunk and what not, and how much and when. So b there's not much risk in your purchase. But you cannot carry teachings away in a separate container. You put down your money and take the teaching away in your soul by having learned it, and off you go, either helped or injured. Anyway, these are the questions we should look into, with the help of our elders. You and I are still a little too young to get to the bottom of such a great matter. Well, let's do what we had started out to do and go hear this man; and after we have heard him, we can talk with some others also. Protagoras isn't the only one there. There's Hippias c

of Elis too, and also Prodicus of Ceos, I believe. And many others as well, wise men all."

Having agreed on this, we set out. When we got to the doorway we stood there discussing some point which had come up along the road and which we didn't want to leave unsettled before we went in. So we were standing there in the doorway discussing it until we reached an agreement,
d and I think the doorman, a eunuch, overheard us. He must have been annoyed with all the traffic of sophists in and out of the house, because when we knocked he opened the door, took one look at us and said, "Ha! More sophists! He's busy." Then he slammed the door in our faces with both hands as hard as he could. We knocked again, and he answered through the locked door, "Didn't you hear me say he's busy?" "My good
e man," I said, "we haven't come to see Callias, and we are not sophists. Calm down. We want to see Protagoras. That's why we've come. So please announce us." Eventually he opened the door for us.

When we went in we found Protagoras walking in the portico flanked by two groups. On one side were Callias, son of Hipponicus, and his
315 brother on his mother's side, Paralus, son of Pericles, and Charmides,[5] son of Glaucon. On the other side were Pericles' other son, Xanthippus, Philippides, son of Philomelus, and Antimoerus of Mende, Protagoras' star pupil who is studying professionally to become a sophist. Following behind and trying to listen to what was being said were a group of what seemed to be mostly foreigners, men whom Protagoras collects from the
b various cities he travels through. He enchants them with his voice like Orpheus, and they follow the sound of his voice in a trance. There were some locals also in this chorus, whose dance simply delighted me when I saw how beautifully they took care never to get in Protagoras' way. When he turned around with his flanking groups, the audience to the rear would split into two in a very orderly way and then circle around to either side and form up again behind him. It was quite lovely.

c And then I perceived (as Homer[6] says) Hippias of Elis, on a high seat in the other side of the colonnade. Seated on benches around him were Eryximachus,[7] son of Acumenus, Phaedrus of Myrrhinus, Andron, son of Androtion, a number of Elians and a few other foreigners. They seemed to be asking Hippias questions on astronomy and physics, and he, from his high seat, was answering each of their questions point by point.

d And not only that, but I saw Tantalus too, for Prodicus of Ceos was also in town. He was in a room which Hipponicus had formerly used for storage, but because of the number of visitors Callias had cleared it out

5. For Charmides (d. 403 B.C.), see the *Charmides* and its Introductory Note.

6. *Odyssey* xi.601. Socrates' reference below to "seeing Tantalus" is another quotation from the same passage, in which Odysseus reports what he saw in his descent into the underworld.

7. Eryximachus is a doctor; he appears in Plato's *Symposium*, as does his friend Phaedrus, on whom see also the dialogue *Phaedrus*.

and made it into a guest room. Prodicus was still in bed and looked to be bundled up in a pile of sheepskin fleeces and blankets. Seated on couches next to him were Pausanias[8] from Cerames, and with Pausanias a fairly e
young boy, well-bred I would say, and certainly good-looking. I think I heard his name is Agathon, and I wouldn't be surprised if he were Pausanias' young love. So this boy was there, and the two Adeimantuses,[9] sons of Cepis and Leucolophides, and there seemed to be some others. What they were talking about I couldn't tell from outside, even though I really 316
wanted to hear Prodicus, a man who in my opinion is godlike in his universal knowledge. But his voice is so deep that it set up a reverberation in the room that blurred what was being said.

We had just arrived when along came Alcibiades the Beautiful (as you call him, and I'm not arguing) and Critias son of Callaeschrus.[10] So when we were inside and had spent a little more time looking at everything, b
we went up to Protagoras, and I said, "Protagoras, Hippocrates here and I have come to see you."

"Do you want to talk with me alone or with others present?" he said.

"It doesn't make any difference to us," I said. "Listen to what we've come for, and decide for yourself."

"Well, then, what have you come for?" he asked.

"Hippocrates is from here, a son of Apollodorus and a member of a great and well-to-do family. His own natural ability ranks him with the best of anyone his age. It's my impression that he wants to be a man of c
respect in the city, and he thinks this is most likely to happen if he associates himself with you. So now you must decide. Should we discuss this alone or in the presence of others?"

"Your discretion on my behalf is appropriate, Socrates. Caution is in order for a foreigner who goes into the great cities and tries to persuade the best of the young men in them to abandon their associations with d
others, relatives and acquaintances, young and old alike, and to associate with him instead on the grounds that they will be improved by this association. Jealousy, hostility, and intrigue on a large scale are aroused by such activity. Now, I maintain that the sophist's art is an ancient one, but that the men who practiced it in ancient times, fearing the odium attached to it, disguised it, masking it sometimes as poetry, as Homer and Hesiod and Simonides did, or as mystery religions and prophecy, witness Orpheus and Musaeus, and occasionally, I've noticed, even as athletics, as with e
Iccus of Tarentum and, in our own time, Herodicus of Selymbria (originally of Megara), as great a sophist as any. Your own Agathocles, a great sophist, used music as a front, as did Pythoclides of Ceos, and many others. All 317

8. Pausanias and Agathon are among those who give speeches in praise of love in the *Symposium*.

9. The first of these is unknown, the second was later an Athenian general in the Peloponnesian War.

10. For Critias (c. 460–403) see the *Charmides* and its Introductory Note.

of them, as I say, used these various arts as screens out of fear of ill will. And this is where I part company with them all, for I do not believe that they accomplished their end; I believe they failed, in fact, to conceal from the powerful men in the cities the true purpose of their disguises. The
b masses, needless to say, perceive nothing, but merely sing the tune their leaders announce. Now, for a runaway not to succeed in running away, but to be caught in the open, is sheer folly from the start and inevitably makes men even more hostile than they were before, for on top of everything else they perceive him as a real rogue. So I have come down the completely opposite road. I admit that I am a sophist and that I educate
c men, and I consider this admission to be a better precaution than denial. And I have given thought to other precautions as well, so as to avoid, God willing, suffering any ill from admitting I am a sophist. I have been in the profession many years now, and I'm old enough to be the father of any of you here. So, if you do have a request, it would give me the greatest pleasure by far to deliver my lecture in the presence of everyone in the house."

d It looked to me that he wanted to show off in front of Prodicus and Hippias, and to bask in glory because we had come as his admirers, so I said, "Well, why don't we call Prodicus and Hippias over, and their companions, so that they can listen to us?"

"By all means!" said Protagoras.

"Then you want to make this a general session and have everyone take seats for a discussion?" Callias proposed this, and it seemed like the only thing to do. We were all overjoyed at the prospect of listening to wise men, and we laid hold of the benches and couches ourselves and arranged
e them over by Hippias, since that's where the benches were already. Meanwhile Callias and Alcibiades had gotten Prodicus up and brought him over with his group.

When we had all taken our seats, Protagoras said, "Now, then, Socrates, since these gentlemen also are present, would you please say what it was you brought up to me a little while ago on the young man's behalf."

318 "Well, Protagoras," I said, "as to why we have come, I'll begin as I did before. Hippocrates here has gotten to the point where he wants to be your student, and, quite naturally, he would like to know what he will get out of it if he does study with you. That's really all we have to say."

Protagoras took it from there and said, "Young man, this is what you will get if you study with me: The very day you start, you will go home
b a better man, and the same thing will happen the day after. Every day, day after day, you will get better and better."

When I heard this I said, "What you're saying, Protagoras, isn't very surprising, but quite likely. Why, even you, though you are so old and wise, would get better if someone taught you something you didn't happen to know already. But what if the situation were a little different, and Hippocrates here all of a sudden changed his mind and set his heart on
c studying with this young fellow who has just come into town, Zeuxippus

of Heraclea, and came to him, as he now comes to you, and heard from him the very same thing as from you—that each day he spent with him he would become better and make progress. If Hippocrates asked him in what way he would become better, and toward what he would be making progress, Zeuxippus would say at painting. And if he were studying with Orthagoras of Thebes and he heard from him the same thing as he hears from you and asked him in what he would be getting better every day he studied with him, Orthagoras would say at flute-playing. It is in this way d
that you must tell me and the young man on whose behalf I am asking the answer to this question: If Hippocrates studies with Protagoras, exactly how will he go away a better man and in what will he make progress each and every day he spends with you?"

Protagoras heard me out and then said, "You put your question well, Socrates, and I am only too glad to answer those who pose questions well. If Hippocrates comes to me he will not experience what he would if he studied with some other sophist. The others abuse young men, steering e
them back again, against their will, into subjects the likes of which they have escaped from at school, teaching them arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music, and poetry"—at this point he gave Hippias a significant look—"but if he comes to me he will learn only what he has come for. What I teach is sound deliberation, both in domestic matters—how best to manage 319
one's household, and in public affairs—how to realize one's maximum potential for success in political debate and action."

"Am I following what you are saying?" I asked. "You appear to be talking about the art of citizenship, and to be promising to make men good citizens."

"This is exactly what I claim, Socrates."

"Well, this is truly an admirable technique you have developed, if indeed you have. There is no point in my saying to you anything other than b
exactly what I think. The truth is, Protagoras, I have never thought that this could be taught, but when you say it can be, I can't very well doubt it. It's only right that I explain where I got the idea that this is not teachable, not something that can be imparted from one human being to another. I maintain, along with the rest of the Greek world, that the Athenians are wise. And I observe that when we convene in the Assembly and the city has to take some action on a building project, we send for builders to advise us; if it has to do with the construction of ships, we send for shipwrights; and so forth for everything that is considered learnable and c
teachable. But if anyone else, a person not regarded as a craftsman, tries to advise them, no matter how handsome and rich and well-born he might be, they just don't accept him. They laugh at him and shout him down until he either gives up trying to speak and steps down himself, or the archer-police remove him forcibly by order of the board. This is how they proceed in matters which they consider technical. But when it is a matter d
of deliberating on city management, anyone can stand up and advise them, carpenter, blacksmith, shoemaker, merchant, ship-captain, rich man, poor

man, well-born, low-born—it doesn't matter—and nobody blasts him for presuming to give counsel without any prior training under a teacher. The
e reason for this is clear: They do not think that this can be taught. Public life aside, the same principle holds also in private life, where the wisest and best of our citizens are unable to transmit to others the virtues that they possess. Look at Pericles,[11] the father of these young men here. He
320 gave them a superb education in everything that teachers can teach, but as for what he himself is really wise in, he neither teaches them that himself nor has anyone else teach them either, and his sons have to browse like stray sacred cattle and pick up virtue on their own wherever they might find it. Take a good look at Clinias, the younger brother of Alcibiades here. When Pericles became his guardian he was afraid that he would be corrupted, no less, by Alcibiades. So he separated them and placed Clinias in Ariphron's house and tried to educate him there. Six months later he
b gave him back to Alcibiades because he couldn't do anything with him. I could mention a great many more, men who are good themselves but have never succeeded in making anyone else better, whether family members or total strangers. Looking at these things, Protagoras, I just don't think that virtue can be taught. But when I hear what you have to say, I waver; I think there must be something in what you are talking about. I consider you to be a person of enormous experience who has learned much from others and thought through a great many things for himself. So if you can clarify for us how virtue is teachable, please don't begrudge us your explanation."

c "I wouldn't think of begrudging you an explanation, Socrates," he replied. "But would you rather that I explain by telling you a story, as an older man to a younger audience, or by developing an argument?"

The consensus was that he should proceed in whichever way he wished. "I think it would be more pleasant," he said, "if I told you a story.

d "There once was a time when the gods existed but mortal races did not. When the time came for their appointed genesis, the gods molded them inside the earth, blending together earth and fire and various compounds of earth and fire. When they were ready to bring them to light the gods put Prometheus and Epimetheus in charge of decking them out and assigning to each its appropriate powers and abilities.

"Epimetheus begged Prometheus for the privilege of assigning the abilities himself. 'When I've completed the distribution,' he said, 'you can inspect it.' Prometheus agreed, and Epimetheus started distributing abilities.

e "To some he assigned strength without quickness; the weaker ones he made quick. Some he armed; others he left unarmed but devised for them
321 some other means for preserving themselves. He compensated for small size by issuing wings for flight or an underground habitat. Size was itself a safeguard for those he made large. And so on down the line, balancing

11. The great Athenian statesman and general (c. 495–429).

his distribution, making adjustments, and taking precautions against the possible extinction of any of the races.

"After supplying them with defenses against mutual destruction, he devised for them protection against the weather. He clothed them with b
thick pelts and tough hides capable of warding off winter storms, effective against heat, and serving also as built-in, natural bedding when they went to sleep. He also shod them, some with hooves, others with thick pads of bloodless skin. Then he provided them with various forms of nourishment, plants for some, fruit from trees for others, roots for still others. And there were some to whom he gave the consumption of other animals as their sustenance. To some he gave the capacity for few births; to others, ravaged by the former, he gave the capacity for multiple births, and so ensured the survival of their kind.

"But Epimetheus was not very wise, and he absentmindedly used up c
all the powers and abilities on the nonreasoning animals; he was left with the human race, completely unequipped. While he was floundering about at a loss, Prometheus arrived to inspect the distribution and saw that while the other animals were well provided with everything, the human race was naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed, and it was already the day on which all of them, human beings included, were destined to emerge from the earth into the light. It was then that Prometheus, desperate to d
find some means of survival for the human race, stole from Hephaestus and Athena wisdom in the practical arts together with fire (without which this kind of wisdom is effectively useless) and gave them outright to the human race. The wisdom it acquired was for staying alive; wisdom for living together in society, political wisdom, it did not acquire, because that was in the keeping of Zeus. Prometheus no longer had free access to the high citadel that is the house of Zeus, and besides this, the guards there were terrifying. But he did sneak into the building that Athena and Hephaestus e
shared to practice their arts, and he stole from Hephaestus the art of fire and from Athena her arts, and he gave them to the human race. And it 322
is from this origin that the resources human beings needed to stay alive came into being. Later, the story goes, Prometheus was charged with theft, all on account of Epimetheus.

"It is because humans had a share of the divine dispensation that they alone among animals worshipped the gods, with whom they had a kind of kinship, and erected altars and sacred images. It wasn't long before they were articulating speech and words and had invented houses, clothes, shoes, and blankets, and were nourished by food from the earth. Thus b
equipped, human beings at first lived in scattered isolation; there were no cities. They were being destroyed by wild beasts because they were weaker in every way, and although their technology was adequate to obtain food, it was deficient when it came to fighting wild animals. This was because they did not yet possess the art of politics, of which the art of war is a part. They did indeed try to band together and survive by founding cities. The outcome when they did so was that they wronged each other, because

c they did not possess the art of politics, and so they would scatter and again be destroyed. Zeus was afraid that our whole race might be wiped out, so he sent Hermes to bring justice and a sense of shame to humans, so that there would be order within cities and bonds of friendship to unite them. Hermes asked Zeus how he should distribute shame and justice to humans. 'Should I distribute them as the other arts were? This is how the others were distributed: one person practicing the art of medicine suffices for many ordinary people; and so forth with the other practitioners. Should
d I establish justice and shame among humans in this way, or distribute it to all?' 'To all,' said Zeus, 'and let all have a share. For cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these, as is the case with the other arts. And establish this law as coming from me: Death to him who cannot partake of shame and justice, for he is a pestilence to the city.'

"And so it is, Socrates, that when the Athenians (and others as well) are debating architectural excellence, or the virtue proper to any other professional specialty, they think that only a few individuals have the right
e to advise them, and they do not accept advice from anyone outside these select few. You've made this point yourself, and with good reason, I might add. But when the debate involves political excellence, which must proceed
323 entirely from justice and temperance, they accept advice from anyone, and with good reason, for they think that this particular virtue, political or civic virtue, is shared by all, or there wouldn't be any cities. This must be the explanation for it, Socrates.

"And so you won't think you've been deceived, consider this as further evidence for the universal belief that all humans have a share of justice and the rest of civic virtue. In the other arts, as you have said, if someone claims to be a good flute-player or whatever, but is not, people laugh at
b him or get angry with him, and his family comes round and remonstrates with him as if he were mad. But when it comes to justice or any other social virtue, even if they know someone is unjust, if that person publicly confesses the truth about himself, they will call this truthfulness madness, whereas in the previous case they would have called it a sense of decency.
c They will say that everyone ought to claim to be just, whether they are or not, and that it is madness not to pretend to justice, since one must have some trace of it or not be human.

"This, then, is my first point: It is reasonable to admit everyone as an adviser on this virtue, on the grounds that everyone has some share of it. Next I will attempt to show that people do *not* regard this virtue as natural or self-generated, but as something taught and carefully developed in those in whom it is developed.

d "In the case of evils that men universally regard as afflictions due to nature or bad luck, no one ever gets angry with anyone so afflicted or reproves, admonishes, punishes, or tries to correct them. We simply pity them. No one in his right mind would try to do anything like this to someone who is ugly, for example, or scrawny or weak. The reason is, I assume, that they know that these things happen to people as a natural

process or by chance, both these ills and their opposites. But in the case of the good things that accrue to men through practice and training and e
teaching, if someone does not possess these goods but rather their corresponding evils, he finds himself the object of anger, punishment, and reproof. Among these evils are injustice, impiety, and in general everything 324
that is opposed to civic virtue. Offenses in this area are always met with anger and reproof, and the reason is clearly that this virtue is regarded as something acquired through practice and teaching. The key, Socrates, to the true significance of punishment lies in the fact that human beings consider virtue to be something acquired through training. For no one b
punishes a wrong-doer in consideration of the simple fact that he has done wrong, unless one is exercising the mindless vindictiveness of a beast. Reasonable punishment is not vengeance for a past wrong—for one cannot undo what has been done—but is undertaken with a view to the future, to deter both the wrong-doer and whoever sees him being punished from c
repeating the crime. This attitude towards punishment as deterrence implies that virtue is learned, and this is the attitude of all those who seek requital in public or in private. All human beings seek requital from and punish those who they think have wronged them, and the Athenians, your fellow citizens, especially do so. Therefore, by my argument, the Athenians are among those who think that virtue is acquired and taught. So it is with good reason that your fellow citizens accept a blacksmith's or a cobbler's advice in political affairs. And they do think that virtue is acquired d
and taught. It appears to me that both these propositions have been sufficiently proved, Socrates.

"Now, on to your remaining difficulty, the problem you raise about good men teaching their sons everything that can be taught and making them wise in these subjects, but not making them better than anyone else in the particular virtue in which they themselves excel. On this subject, Socrates, I will abandon story for argument. Consider this: Does there or e
does there not exist one thing which all citizens must have for there to be a city? Here and nowhere else lies the solution to your problem. For if such a thing exists, and this one thing is not the art of the carpenter, the blacksmith, or the potter, but justice, and temperance, and piety—what I 325
may collectively term the virtue of a man, and if this is the thing which everyone should share in and with which every man should act whenever he wants to learn anything or do anything, but should not act without it, and if we should instruct and punish those who do not share in it, man, b
woman, and child, until their punishment makes them better, and should exile from our cities or execute whoever doesn't respond to punishment and instruction; if this is the case, if such is the nature of this thing, and good men give their sons an education in everything but this, then we have to be amazed at how strangely our good men behave. For we have shown that they regard this thing as teachable both in private and public life. Since it is something that can be taught and nurtured, is it possible that they have their sons taught everything in which there is no death

penalty for not understanding it, but when their children are faced with
c the death penalty or exile if they fail to learn virtue and be nurtured in it—and not only death but confiscation of property and, practically speaking, complete familial catastrophe—do you think they do not have them taught this or give them all the attention possible? We must think that they do, Socrates.

"Starting when they are little children and continuing as long as they
d live, they teach them and correct them. As soon as a child understands what is said to him, the nurse, mother, tutor, and the father himself fight for him to be as good as he possibly can, seizing on every action and word to teach him and show him that this is just, that is unjust, this is noble, that is ugly, this is pious, that is impious, he should do this, he should not do that. If he obeys willingly, fine; if not, they straighten him out with threats and blows as if he were a twisted, bent piece of wood. After this
e they send him to school and tell his teachers to pay more attention to his good conduct than to his grammar or music lessons. The teachers pay attention to these things, and when the children have learned their letters and are getting to understand writing as well as the spoken language, they are given the works of good poets to read at their desks and have to
326 learn them by heart, works that contain numerous exhortations, many passages describing in glowing terms good men of old, so that the child is inspired to imitate them and become like them. In a similar vein, the music teachers too foster in their young pupils a sense of moral decency and restraint, and when they learn to play the lyre they are taught the
b works of still more good poets, the lyric and choral poets. The teachers arrange the scores and drill the rhythms and scales into the children's souls, so that they become gentler, and their speech and movements become more rhythmical and harmonious. For all of human life requires a high degree of rhythm and harmony. On top of all this, they send their children to an athletic trainer so that they may have sound bodies in the service
c of their now fit minds and will not be forced to cowardice in war or other activities through physical deficiencies.

"This is what the most able, i.e., the richest, do. Their sons start going
d to school at the earliest age and quit at the latest age. And when they quit school, the city in turn compels them to learn the laws and to model their lives on them. They are not to act as they please. An analogy might be drawn from the practice of writing-teachers, who sketch the letters faintly with a pen in workbooks for their beginning students and have them write the letters over the patterns they have drawn. In the same way the city has drawn up laws invented by the great lawgivers in the past and compels them to govern and be governed by them. She punishes anyone who goes beyond these laws, and the term for this punishment in your city and
e others is, because it is a corrective legal action, 'correction.'

"When so much care and attention is paid to virtue, Socrates, both in public and private, are you still puzzled about virtue being teachable? The wonder would be if it were not teachable.

"Why, then, do many sons of good fathers never amount to anything? I want you to understand this too, and in fact it's no great wonder, if what I've just been saying is true about virtue being something in which no one 327
can be a layman if there is to be a city. For if what I am saying is true—and nothing could be more true: Pick any other pursuit or study and reflect upon it. Suppose, for instance, there could be no city unless we were all flute-players, each to the best of his ability, and everybody were teaching everybody else this art in public and private and reprimanding the poor players and doing all this unstintingly, just as now no one begrudges or b
conceals his expertise in what is just and lawful as he does his other professional expertise. For it is to our collective advantage that we each possess justice and virtue, and so we all gladly tell and teach each other what is just and lawful. Well, if we all had the same eagerness and generosity in teaching each other flute-playing, do you think, Socrates, that the sons of good flute-players would be more likely to be good flute-players than the sons of poor flute-players? I don't think so at all. When a son happened to be naturally disposed toward flute-playing, he would progress c
and become famous; otherwise, he would remain obscure. In many cases the son of a good player would turn out to be a poor one, and the son of a poor player would turn out to be good. But as flute-players, they would all turn out to be capable when compared with ordinary people who had never studied the flute. Likewise you must regard the most unjust person ever reared in a human society under law as a paragon of justice compared d
with people lacking education and lawcourts and the pervasive pressure to cultivate virtue, savages such as the playwright Pherecrates brought on stage at last year's Lenaean festival. There's no doubt that if you found yourself among such people, as did the misanthropes in that play's chorus, you would be delighted to meet up with the likes of Eurybatus and e
Phrynondas[12] and would sorely miss the immorality of the people here. As it is, Socrates, you affect delicate sensibilities, because everyone here is a teacher of virtue, to the best of his ability, and you can't see a single one. You might as well look for a teacher of Greek; you wouldn't find a 328
single one of those either. Nor would you be any more successful if you asked who could teach the sons of our craftsmen the very arts which they of course learned from their fathers, to the extent that their fathers were competent, and their friends in the trade. It would be difficult to produce someone who could continue their education, whereas it would be easy to find a teacher for the totally unskilled. It is the same with virtue and everything else. If there is someone who is the least bit more advanced in virtue than ourselves, he is to be cherished.

"I consider myself to be such a person, uniquely qualified to assist others b
in becoming noble and good, and worth the fee that I charge and even more, so much so that even my students agree. This is why I charge according to the following system: a student pays the full price only if he c

12. Historical persons, conventional paradigms of viciousness.

wishes to; otherwise, he goes into a temple, states under oath how much he thinks my lessons are worth, and pays that amount.

"There you have it, Socrates, my mythic story and my argument that virtue is teachable and that the Athenians consider it to be so, and that it is no wonder that worthless sons are born of good fathers and good sons of worthless fathers, since even the sons of Polyclitus, of the same age as
d Paralus and Xanthippus here, are nothing compared to their father, and the same is true for the sons of other artisans. But it is not fair to accuse these two yet; there is still hope for them, for they are young."

Protagoras ended his virtuoso performance here and stopped speaking. I was entranced and just looked at him for a long time as if he were going to say more. I was still eager to listen, but when I perceived that he had really stopped I pulled myself together and, looking at Hippocrates, barely
e managed to say: "Son of Apollodorus, how grateful I am to you for suggesting that I come here. It is marvelous to have heard from Protagoras what I have just heard. Formerly I used to think there was no human practice by which the good become good, but now I am persuaded that there is, except for one small obstacle which Protagoras will explain away, I am
329 sure, since he has explained away so much already. Now, you could hear a speech similar to this from Pericles or some other competent orator if you happened to be present when one of them was speaking on this subject. But try asking one of them something, and they will be as unable to answer your question or to ask one of their own as a book would be. Question the least little thing in their speeches and they will go on like bronze bowls that keep ringing for a long time after they have been struck and prolong the sound indefinitely unless you dampen them. That's how
b these orators are: Ask them one little question and they're off on another long-distance speech. But Protagoras here, while perfectly capable of delivering a beautiful long speech, as we have just seen, is also able to reply briefly when questioned, and to put a question and then wait for and accept the answer—rare accomplishments these.

"Now, then, Protagoras, I need one little thing, and then I'll have it all, if you'll just answer me this. You say that virtue is teachable, and if there's
c any human being who could persuade me of this, it's you. But there is one thing you said that troubles me, and maybe you can satisfy my soul. You said that Zeus sent justice and a sense of shame to the human race. You also said, at many points in your speech, that justice and temperance[13] and piety and all these things were somehow collectively one thing: virtue.
d Could you go through this again and be more precise? Is virtue a single thing, with justice and temperance and piety its parts, or are the things I have just listed all names for a single entity? This is what still intrigues me."

13. The Greek term is *sōphrosunē*. For Plato, *sōphrosunē* was a complex virtue involving self-control and moderation of the physical appetites, as well as good sense and self-knowledge.

"This is an easy question to answer, Socrates," he replied. "Virtue is a single entity, and the things you are asking about are its parts."

"Parts as in the parts of a face: mouth, nose, eyes, and ears? Or parts as in the parts of gold, where there is no difference, except for size, between parts or between the parts and the whole?"

"In the former sense, I would think, Socrates: as the parts of the face e
are to the whole face."

"Then tell me this. Do some people have one part and some another, or do you necessarily have all the parts if you have any one of them?"

"By no means, since many are courageous but unjust, and many again are just but not wise."

"Then these also are parts of virtue—wisdom and courage?"

"Absolutely, and wisdom is the greatest part." 330

"Is each of them different from the others?"

"Yes."

"And does each also have its own unique power or function? In the analogy to the parts of the face, the eye is not like the ear, nor is its power or function the same, and this applies to the other parts as well: They are not like each other in power or function or in any other way. Is this how it is with the parts of virtue? Are they unlike each other, both in themselves b
and in their powers or functions? Is it not clear that this must be the case, if our analogy is valid?"

"Yes, it must be the case, Socrates."

"Then, none of the other parts of virtue is like knowledge, or like justice, or like courage, or like temperance, or like piety?"

"Agreed."

"Come on, then, and let's consider together what kind of thing each of c
these is. Here's a good first question: Is justice a thing or is it not a thing? I think it is. What about you?"

"I think so too."

"The next step, then: Suppose someone asked us, 'Protagoras and Socrates, tell me about this thing you just named, justice. Is it itself just or unjust?' My answer would be that it is just. What would your verdict be? The same as mine or different?"

"The same."

"Then justice is the sort of thing that is just. That's how I would reply to the questioner. Would you also?"

"Yes."

"Suppose he questioned us further: 'Do you also say there is a thing d
called piety?' We would say we do, right?"

"Right."

" 'Do you say this too is a thing?' We would say we do, wouldn't we?"

"That too."

" 'Do you say that this thing is by nature impious or pious?' Myself, I would be irritated with this question and would say, 'Quiet, man! How e

could anything else be pious if piety itself is not?' What about you? "Wouldn't you answer in the same way?"

"Absolutely."

"Suppose he asked us next: 'Then what about what you said a little while ago? Maybe I didn't hear you right. I thought you two said that the parts of virtue are related to each other in such a way that no part resembles
331 any other.' I would answer, 'There's nothing wrong with your hearing, except that I didn't say that. Protagoras here said that in answer to my question.' If he were to say then, 'Is he telling the truth, Protagoras? Are you the one who says that one part of virtue is not like another? Is this dictum yours?' how would you answer him?"

"I would have to admit it, Socrates."

"Well, if we accept that, Protagoras, what are we going to say if he asks next, 'Isn't piety the sort of thing that is just, and isn't justice the sort of thing that is pious? Or is it the sort of thing which is not pious? Is piety
b the sort of thing to be not just, and therefore unjust, and justice impious?' What are we going to say to him? Personally, I would answer both that justice is pious and piety is just, and I would give the same answer on your behalf (if you would let me), that justice is the same thing as piety, or very similar, and, most emphatically, that justice is the same kind of thing as piety, and piety as justice. What do you think? Will you veto this answer, or are you in agreement with it?"

c "It's not so absolutely clear a case to me, Socrates, as to make me grant that justice is pious, and piety just. It seems a distinction is in order here. But what's the difference? If you want, we'll let justice be pious and piety just."

"Don't do that to me! It's not this 'if you want' or 'if you agree' business I want to test. It's you and me I want to put on the line, and I think the argument will be tested best if we take the 'if' out."

d "Well, all right. Justice does have some resemblance to piety. Anything at all resembles any other thing in some way. There is a certain way in which white resembles black, and hard soft, and so on for all the usual polar opposites. And the things we were just talking about as having
e different powers or functions and not being the same kinds of things—the parts of the face—these resemble each other in a certain way, and they are like each other. So by this method you could prove, if you wanted to, that these things too are all like each other. But it's not right to call things similar because they resemble each other in some way, however slight, or to call them dissimilar because there is some slight point of dissimilarity."

I was taken aback, and said to him, "Do you consider the relationship between justice and piety really only one of some slight similarity?"

332 "Not exactly, but not what you seem to think it is either."

"Well, then, since you seem to me to be annoyed about this, let's drop it and consider another point that you raised. Do you acknowledge that there is such a thing as folly?"

"Yes."

"And diametrically opposed to it is wisdom?"

"It seems so to me."

"And when people act correctly and beneficially, do they seem to you to be acting temperately or the opposite?"

"Temperately."

"Then it is by temperance that they act temperately?"

"It has to be." b

"And those who do not act correctly act foolishly, and those who act this way do not act temperately?"

"I agree."

"And the opposite of acting foolishly is acting temperately?"

"Yes."

"And foolish behavior is done with folly, just as temperate behavior is done with temperance?"

"Yes."

"And if something is done with strength, it is done strongly; if done with weakness, it is done weakly?"

"I agree."

"If it is done with quickness, it is done quickly, and if with slowness, slowly?"

"Yes."

"So whatever is done in a certain way is done from a certain quality, c and whatever is done in the opposite way is done from its opposite?"

"I agree."

"Then let's go. Is there such a thing as beauty?"

"Yes."

"Is there any opposite to it except ugliness?"

"There is not."

"Is there such a thing as goodness?"

"There is."

"Is there any opposite to it except badness?"

"There is not."

"Is there such a thing as a shrill tone?"

"There is."

"Is there any opposite to it except a deep tone?"

"No, there is not."

"So for each thing that can have an opposite, there is only one opposite, d not many?"

"I agree."

"Suppose we now count up our points of agreement. Have we agreed that there is one opposite for one thing, and no more?"

"Yes, we have."

"And that what is done in an opposite way is done from opposites?"

"Yes."

"And have we agreed that what is done foolishly is done in a way opposite to what is done temperately?"

"We have."

"And that what is done temperately is done from temperance, and what is done foolishly is done from folly?"

"Agreed."

e "And it's true that if it's done in an opposite way, it is done from an opposite?"

"Yes."

"And one is done from temperance, the other from folly?"

"Yes."

"In an opposite way?"

"Yes."

"From opposites?"

"Yes."

"Then folly is the opposite of temperance?"

"It seems so."

"Well, then, do you recall our previous agreement that folly is the opposite of wisdom?"

"Yes, I do."

"And that one thing has only one opposite?"

"Of course."

333 "Then which of these propositions should we abandon, Protagoras? The proposition that for one thing there is only one opposite, or the one stating that wisdom is different from temperance and that each is a part of virtue, and that in addition to being distinct they are dissimilar, both in themselves and in their powers or functions, just like the parts of a face? Which should we abandon? The two statements are dissonant; they b are not in harmony with one another. How could they be, if there is one and only one opposite for each single thing, while folly, which is a single thing, evidently has two opposites, wisdom and temperance? Isn't this how it stands, Protagoras?"

He assented, although very grudgingly, and I continued:

"Wouldn't that make wisdom and temperance one thing? And a little while ago it looked like justice and piety were nearly the same thing. Come on, Protagoras, we can't quit now, not before we've tied up these loose ends. So, does someone who acts unjustly seem temperate to you in that he acts unjustly?"

c "I would be ashamed to say that is so, Socrates, although many people do say it."

"Then shall I address myself to them or to you?"

"If you like, why don't you debate the majority position first?"

"It makes no difference to me, provided you give the answers, whether it is your own opinion or not. I am primarily interested in testing the argument, although it may happen both that the questioner, myself, and my respondent wind up being tested."

At first Protagoras played it coy, claiming the argument was too hard for him to handle, but after a while he consented to answer. d

"Let's start all over, then," I said, "with this question. Do you think some people are being sensible[14] when they act unjustly?"

"Let us grant it," he said.

"And by 'sensible' you mean having good sense?"

"Yes."

"And having good sense means having good judgment in acting unjustly?"

"Granted."

"Whether or not they get good results by acting unjustly?"

"Only if they get good results."

"Are you saying, then, that there are things that are good?"

"I am."

"These good things constitute what is advantageous to people?"

"Good God, yes! And even if they are not advantageous to people, I can still call them good." e

I could see that Protagoras was really worked up and struggling by now and that he was dead set against answering any more. Accordingly, I carefully modified the tone of my questions.

"Do you mean things that are advantageous to no human being, Protagoras, or things that are of no advantage whatsoever? Do you call things like that good?" 334

"Of course not," he said. "But I know of many things that are disadvantageous to humans, foods and drinks and drugs and many other things, and some that are advantageous; some that are neither to humans but one or the other to horses; some that are advantageous only to cattle; some only to dogs; some that are advantageous to none of these but are so to trees; some that are good for the roots of a tree, but bad for its shoots, such as manure, which is good spread on the roots of any plant but absolutely ruinous if applied to the new stems and branches. Or take olive oil, which is extremely bad for all plants and is the worst enemy of the hair of all animals except humans, for whose hair it is beneficial, as it is for the rest of their bodies. But the good is such a multifaceted and variable thing that, in the case of oil, it is good for the external parts of the human body but very bad for the internal parts, which is why doctors universally forbid their sick patients to use oil in their diets except for the least bit, just enough to dispel a prepared meal's unappetizing aroma." b c

When the applause for this speech of Protagoras had died down, I said, "Protagoras, I tend to be a forgetful sort of person, and if someone speaks to me at length I tend to forget the subject of the speech. Now, if I happened to be hard of hearing and you were going to converse with me, you would think you had better speak louder to me than to others. In the same way, d

14. The Greek term is *sōphronein*, a verb related to the noun *sōphrosunē* (temperance).

now that you have fallen in with a forgetful person, you will have to cut your answers short if I am going to follow you."

"How short are you ordering me to make my answers? Shorter than necessary?"

"By no means."

"As long as necessary?"

e "Yes."

"Then should I answer at the length I think necessary or the length you think necessary?"

"Well, I have heard, anyway, that when you are instructing someone 335 in a certain subject, you are able to speak at length, if you choose, and never get off the subject, or to speak so briefly that no one could be briefer. So if you are going to converse with me, please use the latter form of expression, brevity."

"Socrates, I have had verbal contests with many people, and if I were to accede to your request and do as my opponent demanded, I would not be thought superior to anyone, nor would Protagoras be a name to be reckoned with among the Greeks."

b I could see he was uncomfortable with his previous answers and that he would no longer be willing to go on answering in a dialectical discussion, so I considered my work with him to be finished, and I said so: "You know, Protagoras, I'm not exactly pleased myself that our session has not gone the way you think it should. But if you are ever willing to hold a discussion in such a way that I can follow, I will participate in it with you. People say of you—and you say yourself—that you are able to discuss c things speaking either at length or briefly. You are a wise man, after all. But I don't have the ability to make those long speeches: I only wish I did. It was up to you, who have the ability to do both, to make this concession, so that the discussion could have had a chance. But since you're not willing, and I'm somewhat busy and unable to stay for your extended speeches—there's somewhere I have to go—I'll be leaving now. Although I'm sure it would be rather nice to hear them."

d Having had my say, I stood up to go, but as I was getting up, Callias took hold of my wrist with his right hand and grasped this cloak I'm wearing with his left. "We won't let you go, Socrates," he said. "Our discussions wouldn't be the same without you, so please stay here with us, I beg you. There's nothing I would rather hear than you and Protagoras in debate. Please do us all a favor."

e By now I was on my feet and really making as if to leave. I said, "Son of Hipponicus, I have always admired your love of wisdom, and I especially honor and hold it dear now. I would be more than willing to gratify you, if you would ask me something that is possible for me. As it is, you might as well be asking me to keep up with Crison of Himera, the champion sprinter, or to compete with the distance runners, or match strides with the couriers who run all day long. What could I say, except that I want it 336 for myself more than you want it for me, but I simply cannot match these

runners' pace, and if you want to watch me running in the same race with Crison, you must ask him to slow down to my speed, since I am not able to run fast, but he is able to run slowly. So if you have your heart set on hearing me and Protagoras, you must ask him to answer my questions now as he did at the outset—briefly. If he doesn't, what turn will our b dialogue take? To me, the mutual exchange of a dialogue is something quite distinct from a public address."

"But you see, Socrates, Protagoras has a point when he says that he ought to be allowed, no less than you, to conduct the discussion as he sees fit."

At this point Alcibiades jumped in and said: "You're not making sense, Callias. Socrates admits that long speeches are beyond him and concedes c to Protagoras on that score. But when it comes to dialectical discussion and understanding the give and take of argument, I would be surprised if he yields to anyone. Now, if Protagoras admits that he is Socrates' inferior in dialectic, that should be enough for Socrates. But if he contests the point, let him engage in a question-and-answer dialogue and not spin out a long speech every time he answers, fending off the issues because he doesn't want to be accountable, and going on and on until most of the listeners d have forgotten what the question was about, although I guarantee you Socrates won't forget, no matter how he jokes about his memory. So I think that Socrates has a stronger case. Each of us ought to make clear his own opinion."

After Alcibiades it was Critias, I think, who spoke next: "Well, Prodicus and Hippias, it seems to be that Callias is very much on Protagoras' side, e while Alcibiades as usual wants to be on the winning side of a good fight. But there's no need for any of us to lend partisan support to either Socrates or Protagoras. We should instead join in requesting them both not to break up our meeting prematurely."

Prodicus spoke up next: "That's well said, Critias. Those who attend 337 discussions such as this ought to listen impartially, but not equally, to both interlocutors. There is a distinction here. We ought to listen impartially but not divide our attention equally: More should go to the wiser speaker and less to the more unlearned. For my part, I think that the two of you b ought to debate the issues, but dispense with eristics. Friends debate each other on good terms; eristics are for enemies at odds. In this way our meeting would take a most attractive turn, for you, the speakers, would then most surely earn the good opinion, rather than the praise, of those of us listening to you. For a good opinion is guilelessly inherent in the souls of the listeners, but praise is all too often merely a deceitful verbal expression. And then, too, we, your audience, would be most cheered, but c not pleased, for to be cheered is to learn something, to participate in some intellectual activity, and is a mental state; but to be pleased has to do with eating or experiencing some other pleasure in one's body."

Prodicus' remarks were enthusiastically received by the majority of us, and then the wise Hippias spoke: "Gentlemen, I regard all of you here

d present as kinsmen, intimates, and fellow citizens by nature, not by convention. For like is akin to like by nature, but convention, which tyrannizes the human race, often constrains us contrary to nature. Therefore it would be disgraceful for us to understand the nature of things and not—being as we are the wisest of the Greeks and gathered here together in this veritable hall of wisdom, in this greatest and most august house of the e city itself—not, I say, produce anything worthy of all this dignity, but bicker with each other as if we were the dregs of society. I therefore implore and counsel you, Protagoras and Socrates, to be reconciled and to compromise, under our arbitration, as it were, on some middle course. 338 You, Socrates, must not insist on that precise, excessively brief form of discussion if it does not suit Protagoras, but rather allow free rein to the speeches, so that they might communicate to us more impressively and elegantly. And you, Protagoras, must not let out full sail in the wind and leave the land behind to disappear into the Sea of Rhetoric. Both of you b must steer a middle course. So that's what you shall do, and take my advice and choose a referee or moderator or supervisor who will monitor for you the length of your speeches."

Everyone there thought this was a fine idea and gave it their approval. Callias said he wouldn't let me go, and they requested me to choose a moderator. I said it would be unseemly to choose someone to umpire our speeches. "If the person chosen is going to be our inferior, it is not right for an inferior to supervise his superiors. If he's our peer that's no good c either, because he will do the same as we would and be superfluous. Choose someone who's our superior? I honestly think it's impossible for you to choose someone wiser than Protagoras. And if you choose someone who is not his superior but claim that he is, then you're insulting him. Protagoras is just not the insignificant sort of person for whom you appoint a supervisor. For myself, I don't care one way or another. But you have your heart set on this conference and these discussions proceeding, and d if that's going to happen, this is what I want to do. If Protagoras is not willing to answer questions, let him ask them, and I will answer, and at the same time I will try to show him how I think the answerer ought to answer. When I've answered all the questions he wishes to ask, then it's his turn to be accountable to me in the same way. So if he doesn't seem ready and willing to answer the actual question asked, you and I will unite in urgently requesting him, as you have requested me, not to ruin e our conference. This will not require any one supervisor, since you will all supervise together."

Everyone agreed this was the thing to do. Protagoras wanted no part of it, but he had to agree to ask questions, and when he had asked enough, to respond in turn with short answers.

339 So he began to ask questions something like this: "I consider, Socrates, that the greatest part of a man's education is to be in command of poetry, by which I mean the ability to understand the words of the poets, to know when a poem is correctly composed and when not, and to know how to

analyze a poem and to respond to questions about it. So my line of questioning now will still concern the subject of our present discussion, namely virtue, but translated into the sphere of poetry. Now, Simonides somewhere says to Scopas, the son of Creon of Thessaly:

> *For a man to become good truly is hard,* b
> *in hands and feet and mind foursquare,*
> *blamelessly built . . .*

Do you know this lyric ode, or shall I recite it all for you?"

I told him there was no need, for I knew the poem, and it happened to be one to which I had given especially careful attention.

"Good," he said. "So, do you think it's well made or not?"

"Very well made."

"And do you think it's well made if the poet contradicts himself?"

"No."

"Take a better look then." c

"As I've said, I'm already familiar enough with it."

"Then you must know that at some point later in the ode he says:

> *Nor is Pittacus' proverb in tune*
> *however wise a man he was.*
> *Hard it is to be good, he said.*

"You do recognize that both these things are said by the same person?"

"I do."

"Well, do you think that the latter is consistent with the former?"

"It seems so to me," I said (but as I said it I was afraid he had a point there). "Doesn't it seem so to you?"

"How can anyone who says both these things be consistent? First, he d asserts himself that it is hard for a man truly to become good, and then, a little further on in his poem he forgets and criticizes Pittacus for saying the same thing as he did, that it is hard for a man to be good, and refuses to accept from him the same thing that he himself said. And yet, when he criticizes him for saying the same thing as himself, he obviously criticizes himself as well, so either the earlier or the later must not be right."

Protagoras got a noisy round of applause for this speech. At first I felt e as if I had been hit by a good boxer. Everything went black and I was reeling from Protagoras' oratory and the others' clamor. Then, to tell you the truth, to stall for time to consider what the poet meant, I turned to Prodicus and, calling on him, "Prodicus," I said, "Simonides was from your hometown, wasn't he? It's your duty to come to the man's rescue, 340 so I don't mind calling for your help, just as Homer says Scamander called Simoïs to help him when he was besieged by Achilles:

Dear brother, let's buck this hero's strength together.[15]

So also do I summon your aid, lest to our dismay Protagoras destroy
b Simonides. But really, Prodicus, Simonides' rehabilitation does require your special art, by which you distinguish 'wanting' from 'desiring' and make all the other fine distinctions that you did just a while ago. So tell me if you agree with me, because it's not clear to me that Simonides does in fact contradict himself. Just give us your offhand opinion. Are becoming and being the same or different?"

"Good heavens, different."

"All right. Now, in the first passage, Simonides declared as his own opinion that it is hard for a man truly to become good."

c "That's right," Prodicus said.

"Then he criticizes Pittacus not for saying the same thing as himself, as Protagoras thinks, but for saying something different. Because Pittacus did not say that it is hard to *become* good, as Simonides said, but to *be* good. As Prodicus here says, being and becoming are not the same thing, Protago-
d ras. And if being is not the same as becoming, Simonides does not contradict himself. Perhaps Prodicus and many others might agree with Hesiod that it is difficult to become good:

The gods put Goodness where we have to sweat
To get at her. But once you reach the top
She's as easy to have as she was hard at first."[16]

Prodicus applauded me when he heard this, but Protagoras said, "Your rehabilitation, Socrates, has a crippling error greater than the one you are correcting."

"Then I've done my work badly," I said, "and I am the ridiculous sort of physician whose cure is worse than the disease."

"That's exactly right," he said.

e "How so?" said I.

"The poet's ignorance would be monumental if he says the possession of virtue is so trivial when everyone agrees it is the hardest thing in the world."

Then I said, "By heaven, Prodicus' participation in our discussion
341 couldn't be more timely. It may well be, Protagoras, that Prodicus' wisdom is of ancient and divine origin, dating back to the time of Simonides or even earlier. But although your experience is very broad, it does not seem to extend to this branch of wisdom, which I have been schooled in as a pupil of Prodicus. And now it appears that you do not understand that Simonides may well have not conceived of the word 'hard' as you do. In

15. *Iliad* xxi.308.

16. *Works and Days* 289, 291–92.

much the same way Prodicus corrects me each time I use the word 'terrible' to praise you or someone else, as, for example, 'Protagoras is a terribly b wise man.' When I say that, he asks me if I am not ashamed to call good things terrible. For terrible, he says, is bad. No one ever speaks of terrible wealth, or terrible peace, or terrible well-being, but we do hear of terrible disease, terrible war, and terrible poverty, 'terrible' here being 'bad.' So perhaps the Ceans and Simonides conceived of 'hard' as 'bad' or something else that you do not understand. Let's ask Prodicus. He's just the right person to consult on Simonides' dialect. Prodicus, what did Simonides c mean by 'hard'?"

"Bad."

"Then this is why he criticizes Pittacus for saying it is hard to be good, just as if he had heard him say it is bad to be good. Right, Prodicus?"

"What else do you think Simonides meant, Socrates? He was censuring Pittacus, a man from Lesbos brought up in a barbarous dialect, for not distinguishing words correctly."

"Well, Protagoras, you hear Prodicus. Do you have anything to say d in response?"

"You've got it all wrong, Prodicus," Protagoras said. "I am positive that Simonides meant by 'hard' the same thing we do: not 'bad,' but whatever is not easy and takes a lot of effort."

"Oh, but I think so too, Protagoras," I said. "This is what Simonides meant, and Prodicus knows it. He was joking and thought he would test your ability to defend your own statement. The best proof that Simonides e did not mean that 'hard' is 'bad' is found in the very next phrase, which says:

God alone can have this privilege.

He cannot very well mean that it is bad to be good if he then says that God alone has this privilege. Prodicus would call Simonides a reprobate for that and no Cean at all. But I would like to tell you what I think 342 Simonides' purpose is in this ode, if you would like to test my command (to use your term) of poetry. If you'd rather, though, I'll listen to you."

Protagoras heard me out and said, "If you please, Socrates," and then Prodicus, Hippias, and the others urged me on.

"All right, then," I said, "I will try to explain to you what I think this poem is about. Philosophy, first of all, has its most ancient roots and is most widespread among the Greeks in Crete and Lacedaemon, and those b regions have the highest concentration of sophists in the world. But the natives deny it and pretend to be ignorant in order to conceal the fact that it is by their wisdom that they are the leaders of the Greek world, something like those sophists Protagoras was talking about. Their public image is that they owe their superiority to their brave fighting men, and their reason for promoting this image is that if the real basis for their superiority were discovered, i.e., wisdom, everyone else would start cultivating it. This is

top secret; not even the Spartanizing cults in the other cities know about
c it, and so you have all these people getting their ears mangled aping the Spartans, lacing on leather gloves, exercising fanatically and wearing short capes, as if Sparta's political power depended on these things. And when the citizens in Sparta want some privacy to have free and open discussions with their sophists, they pass alien acts against any Spartanizers and other foreigners in town, and conceal their meetings from the rest of the world.
d And so that their young men won't unlearn what they are taught, they do not permit any of them to travel to other cities (the Cretans don't either). Crete and Sparta are places where there are not only men but women also who take pride in their education. You know how to test the truth of my contention that the Spartans have the best education in philosophy and
e debate? Pick any ordinary Spartan and talk with him for a while. At first you will find he can barely hold up his end of the conversation, but at some point he will pick his spot with deadly skill and shoot back a terse remark you'll never forget, something that will make the person he's talking with (in this case you) look like a child. Acute observers have known this for a long time now: To be a Spartan is to be a philosopher
343 much more than to be an athlete. They know that to be able to say something like that is the mark of a perfectly educated man. We're talking about men like Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias of Priene, our own Solon, Cleobulus of Lindus, Myson of Chen, and, the seventh in the list, Chilon of Sparta. All of these emulated, loved, and studied Spartan culture. You
b can see that distinctive kind of Spartan wisdom in their pithy, memorable sayings, which they jointly dedicated as the first fruits of their wisdom to Apollo in his temple at Delphi, inscribing there the maxims now on everyone's lips: 'Know thyself' and 'Nothing in excess.'

"What is my point? That the characteristic style of ancient philosophy
c was laconic brevity. It was in this context that the saying of Pittacus—*It is hard to be good*—was privately circulated with approval among the sages. Then Simonides, ambitious for philosophical fame, saw that if he could score a takedown against this saying, as if it were a famous wrestler, and get the better of it, he would himself become famous in his own lifetime. So he composed this poem as a deliberate attack against this maxim. That's how it seems to me.

"Let's test my hypothesis together, to see whether what I say is true. If
d all the poet wanted to say was that it is hard to become good, then the beginning of the poem would be crazy, for he inserted there an antithetical particle.[17] It doesn't make any sense to insert this unless one supposes that Simonides is addressing the Pittacus maxim as an opponent. Pittacus says it is hard to be good; Simonides rebuts this by saying, 'No, but it is hard

17. The first line of Simonides' ode, "For a man to become good truly is hard," is in fact introduced with a contrasting particle, not translated here. Socrates does not quote the continuation (and the lines have not survived elsewhere), so we do not know what sort of contrast was intended.

for a man to become good, Pittacus, truly.' Notice that he does not say e
truly good; he is not talking about truth in the context of some things being truly good and other things being good but not truly so. This would create an impression of naivete very unlike Simonides. The position of 'truly' in the verse must be a case of hyperbaton. We have to approach this maxim of Pittacus by imagining him speaking and Simonides replying, something like this: Pittacus: 'Gentlemen, it is hard to be good.' Simonides: 344
'What you say is not true, Pittacus, for it is not being but becoming good, in hands and feet and mind foursquare, blamelessly built—that is hard truly.' This way the insertion of the antithetical particle makes sense, and the 'truly' feels correct in its position at the end. Everything that comes after is evidence for this interpretation. The poem is full of details that testify to its excellent composition; indeed, it is a lovely and exquisitely b
crafted piece, but it would take a long time to go through it from that point of view. Let's review instead the overall structure and intention of the ode, which is from beginning to end a refutation of Pittacus' maxim.

"A few lines later he states (imagine he is making a speech): 'To become good truly is hard, and although it may be possible for a short period of c
time, to persist in that state and to be a good man, as you put it, Pittacus, is not humanly possible. God alone can have this privilege,

But that man inevitably is bad
whom incapacitating misfortune throws down.

" 'Whom does incapacitating misfortune throw down when it comes to, say, the command of a ship? Clearly not the ordinary passenger, who is always susceptible. You can't knock down someone already supine; you can only knock down someone standing up and render him supine. In the d
same way, incapacitating misfortune would overthrow only someone who is capable, not the chronically incapable. A hurricane striking a pilot would incapacitate him, a bad season will do it to a farmer, and the same thing applies to a doctor. For the good is susceptible to becoming bad, as another poet testifies:

The good man is at times bad, at times good.

" 'But the bad is not susceptible to becoming bad; it must always be bad. So that when incapacitating misfortune throws down a man who is capable, e
wise, and good, he must "inevitably be bad." You say, Pittacus, that it is hard to be good; in fact, to become good is hard, though possible, but to be good is impossible.

Faring well, every man is good;
Bad, faring ill.

" 'What does it mean to fare well in letters; what makes a man good at
345 them? Clearly, the learning of letters. What kind of faring well makes a good doctor? Clearly, learning how to cure the sick. 'Bad, faring ill': who could become a bad doctor? Clearly, someone who is, first, a doctor and, second, a good doctor. He could in fact become a bad doctor, but we who are medical laymen could never by faring ill become doctors or carpenters
b or any other kind of professional. And if one cannot become a doctor by faring ill, clearly one cannot become a bad one either. In the same way a good man may eventually become bad with the passage of time, or through hardship, disease, or some other circumstance that involves the only real kind of faring ill, which is the loss of knowledge. But the bad man can never become bad, for he is so all the time. If he is to become bad, he must
c first become good. So the tenor of this part of the poem is that it is impossible to be a good man and continue to be good, but possible for one and the same person to become good and also bad, and those are best for the longest time whom the gods love.'

"All this is directed at Pittacus, as the next few lines of the poem make even clearer:

> *Therefore never shall I seek for the impossible,*
> *cast away my life's lot on empty hope, a quixotic quest*
> *for a blameless man among those who reap*
> *the broad earth's fruit,*
> d *but if I find him you will have my report.*

This is strong language, and he keeps up his attack on Pittacus' maxim throughout the poem:

> *All who do no wrong willingly*
> *I praise and love.*
> *Necessity not even the gods resist.*

This is spoken to the same end. For Simonides was not so uneducated as
e to say that he praised all who did nothing bad willingly, as if there were anyone who willingly did bad things. I am pretty sure that none of the wise men thinks that any human being willingly makes a mistake or willingly does anything wrong or bad. They know very well that anyone who does anything wrong or bad does so involuntarily. So also Simonides,
346 who does not say that he praises those who willingly do nothing bad; rather he applies the term 'willingly' to himself. He perceived that a good man, an honorable man, often forces himself to love and praise someone utterly different from himself, one's alienated father perhaps, or mother, or country. Scoundrels in a similar situation are almost happy to see their parents' or country's trouble and viciously point it out and denounce it
b so that their own dereliction of duty toward them will not be called into question. They actually exaggerate their complaints and add gratuitous to

unavoidable hostility, whereas good men conceal the trouble and force themselves to give praise, and if they are angry because their parents or country wronged them, they calm themselves down and reconcile themselves to it, and they force themselves to love and praise their own people. I think that Simonides reflected that on more than one occasion he himself had eulogized some tyrant or other such person, not willingly but because c
he had to. So he is saying to Pittacus: 'Pittacus, it is not because I am an overcritical person that I am criticizing you, since,

enough for me a man who is not bad
nor too intractable, who knows civic Right, a sound man.
I shall not blame him,
for I am not fond of blame.
Infinite the tribe of fools,'

the implication being that a censorious person would have his hands full blaming them.

'All is fair in which foul is not mixed.'

The sense here is not that all is white in which black is not mixed, which d
would be ludicrous in many ways, but rather that he himself accepts without any objection what is in between. 'I do not seek,' he says,

'for a blameless man among those who reap
the broad earth's fruit,
but if I find him you will have my report.'

The meaning is that 'on those terms I will never praise anyone, but I am happy with an average man who does no wrong, since I willingly

praise and love all'—

—note the Lesbian dialect form of the verb 'praise,' since he is addressing e
Pittacus—

'all who do no wrong'

(this is where the pause should be, before 'willingly')

'willingly
I praise and love

but there are some whom I praise and love unwillingly. So if you spoke something even moderately reasonable and true, Pittacus, I would never

347 censure you. But the fact is that you have lied blatantly yet with verisimilitude about extremely important issues, and for that I do censure you.'

"And that, Prodicus and Protagoras," I concluded, "is what I think was going through Simonides' mind when he composed this ode."

b Then Hippias said, "I am favorably impressed by your analysis of this ode, Socrates. I have quite a nice talk on it myself, which I will present to you if you wish."

"Yes, Hippias," Alcibiades said, "some other time, though. What should be done now is what Socrates and Protagoras agreed upon, which is for Socrates to answer any questions Protagoras may still have to ask, or if he so chooses, to answer Socrates' questions."

c Then I said, "I leave it up to Protagoras, but if it's all right with him, why don't we say good-bye to odes and poetry and get back to what I first asked him, a question, Protagoras, which I would be glad to settle in a joint investigation with you. Discussing poetry strikes me as no different from the second-rate drinking parties of the agora crowd. These people, largely uneducated and unable to entertain themselves over their wine by d using their own voices to generate conversation, pay premium prices for flute-girls and rely on the extraneous voice of the reed flute as background music for their parties. But when well-educated gentlemen drink together, you will not see girls playing the flute or the lyre or dancing, but a group that knows how to get together without these childish frivolities, convers- e ing civilly no matter how heavily they are drinking. Ours is such a group, if indeed it consists of men such as most of us claim to be, and it should require no extraneous voices, not even of poets, who cannot be questioned on what they say. When a poet is brought up in a discussion, almost everyone has a different opinion about what he means, and they wind up arguing about something they can never finally decide. The best people 348 avoid such discussions and rely on their own powers of speech to entertain themselves and test each other. These people should be our models. We should put the poets aside and converse directly with each other, testing the truth and our own ideas. If you have more questions to ask, I am ready to answer them; or, if you prefer, you can render the same service to me, and we can resume where we broke off and try to reach a conclusion."

b I went on in this vein, but Protagoras would not state clearly which alternative he preferred. So Alcibiades looked over at Callias and said, "Callias, do you think Protagoras is behaving well in not making it clear whether he will participate in the discussion or not? I certainly don't. He should either participate or say he is not going to, so we will know how he stands, and Socrates, or whoever, can start a discussion with someone else."

c It looked to me that Protagoras was embarrassed by Alcibiades' words, not to mention the insistence of Callias and practically the whole company. In the end he reluctantly brought himself to resume our dialogue and indicated he was ready to be asked questions.

"Protagoras," I said, "I don't want you to think that my motive in talking with you is anything else than to take a good hard look at things that continually perplex me. I think that Homer said it all in the line,

Going in tandem, one perceives before the other.[18] d

Human beings are simply more resourceful this way in action, speech, and thought. If someone has a private perception, he immediately starts going around and looking until he finds somebody he can show it to and have it corroborated. And there is a particular reason why I would rather talk with you than anyone else: I think you are the best qualified to investigate the sort of things that decent and respectable individuals ought e
to examine, and virtue especially. Who else but you? Not only do you consider yourself to be noble and good but, unlike others who are themselves decent and respectable individuals yet unable to make others so, you are not only good yourself but able to make others good as well, and you have so much self-confidence that instead of concealing this skill, as others do, you advertise it openly to the whole Greek world, calling yourself 349
a sophist, highlighting yourself as a teacher of virtue, the first ever to have deemed it appropriate to charge a fee for this. How could I not solicit your help in a joint investigation of these questions? There is no way I could not.

"So right now I want you to remind me of some of the questions I first asked, starting from the beginning. Then I want to proceed together to b
take a good hard look at some other questions. I believe the first question was this: Wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and piety—are these five names for the same thing, or is there underlying each of these names a unique thing, a thing with its own power or function, each one unlike any of the others? You said that they are not names for the same thing, that c
each of these names refers to a unique thing, and that all these are parts of virtue, not like the parts of gold, which are similar to each other and to the whole of which they are parts, but like the parts of a face, dissimilar to the whole of which they are parts and to each other, and each one having its own unique power or function. If this is still your view, say so; if it's changed in any way, make your new position clear, for I am certainly not going to hold you accountable for what you said before if you want d
to say something at all different now. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if you were just trying out something on me before."

"What I am saying to you, Socrates, is that all these are parts of virtue, and that while four of them are reasonably close to each other, courage is completely different from all the rest. The proof that what I am saying is true is that you will find many people who are extremely unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous."

18. *Iliad* x.224.

e "Hold it right there," I said. "This is worth looking into. Would you say courageous men are confident, or something else?"

"Confident, yes, and ready for action where most men would be afraid."

"Well, then, do you agree that virtue is something fine, and that you offer yourself as a teacher of it because it is fine?"

"The finest thing of all, unless I am quite out of my mind."

"Then is part of it worthless and part of it fine, or all of it fine?"

"Surely it is all as fine as can be."

350 "Do you know who dives confidently into wells?"

"Of course, divers."

"Is this because they know what they are doing, or for some other reason?"

"Because they know what they are doing."

"Who are confident in fighting from horseback? Riders or nonriders?"

"Riders."

"And in fighting with shields? Shieldmen or nonshieldmen?"

"Shieldmen, and so on down the line, if that's what you're getting at. Those with the right kind of knowledge are always more confident than those without it, and a given individual is more confident after he acquires it than he was before."

b "But haven't you ever seen men lacking knowledge of all of these things yet confident in each of them?"

"I have, all too confident."

"Is their confidence courage?"

"No, because courage would then be contemptible. These men are out of their minds."

"Then what do you mean by courageous men? Aren't they those who are confident?"

c "I still hold by that."

"Then *these* men who are so confident turn out to be not courageous but mad? And, on the other side, the wisest are the most confident and the most confident are the most courageous? And the logical conclusion would be that wisdom is courage?"

"You are doing a poor job of remembering what I said when I answered your questions, Socrates. When I was asked if the courageous are confident, I agreed. I was not asked if the confident are courageous. If you had asked d me that, I would have said, 'Not all of them.' You have nowhere shown that my assent to the proposition that the courageous are confident was in error. What you did show next was that knowledge increases one's confidence and makes one more confident than those without knowledge. In consequence of this you conclude that courage and wisdom are the same thing. But by following this line of reasoning you could conclude that strength and wisdom are the same thing. First you would ask me if e the strong are powerful, and I would say yes. Then, if those who know how to wrestle are more powerful than those who do not, and if individual wrestlers became more powerful after they learn than they were before.

Again I would say yes. After I had agreed to these things, it would be open to you to use precisely these points of agreement to prove that wisdom is strength. But nowhere in this process do I agree that the powerful are strong, only that the strong are powerful. Strength and power are not 351
the same thing. Power derives from knowledge and also from madness and passionate emotion. Strength comes from nature and proper nurture of the body. So also confidence and courage are not the same thing, with the consequence that the courageous are confident, but not all those who are confident are courageous. For confidence, like power, comes from skill (and from passionate emotion and madness as well); courage, from nature and the proper nurture of the soul."

"Would you say, Protagoras, that some people live well and others b
live badly?"

"Yes."

"But does it seem to you that a person lives well, if he lives distressed and in pain?"

"No, indeed."

"Now, if he completed his life, having lived pleasantly, does he not seem to you to have lived well?"

"It seems that way to me."

"So, then, to live pleasantly is good, and unpleasantly, bad?" c

"Yes, so long as he lived having taken pleasure in honorable things."

"What, Protagoras? Surely you don't, like most people, call some pleasant things bad and some painful things good? I mean, isn't a pleasant thing good just insofar as it is pleasant, that is, if it results in nothing other than pleasure; and, on the other hand, aren't painful things bad in the same way, just insofar as they are painful?"

"I don't know, Socrates, if I should answer as simply as you put the d
question—that everything pleasant is good and everything painful is bad. It seems to me to be safer to respond not merely with my present answer in mind but from the point of view of my life overall, that on the one hand, there are pleasurable things which are not good, and on the other hand, there are painful things which are not bad but some which are, and a third class which is neutral—neither bad nor good."

"You call pleasant things those which partake of pleasure or produce e
pleasure?"

"Certainly."

"So my question is this: Just insofar as things are pleasurable are they good? I am asking whether pleasure itself is not a good."

"Just as you always say, Socrates, let us inquire into this matter, and if your claim seems reasonable and it is established that pleasure and the good are the same, then we will come to agreement; otherwise we will disagree."

"Do you wish to lead this inquiry, or shall I?"

"It is fitting for you to lead, for it is you who brought up the idea."

"All right, will this help to make it clear? When someone evaluates a 352
man's health or other functions of the body through his appearance, he

looks at the face and extremities, and might say: 'Show me your chest and back too, so that I can make a better examination.' That's the kind of investigation I want to make. Having seen how you stand on the good and the pleasant, I need to say something like this to you: Come now, b Protagoras, and reveal this about your mind: What do you think about knowledge? Do you go along with the majority or not? Most people think this way about it, that it is not a powerful thing, neither a leader nor a ruler. They do not think of it in that way at all; but rather in this way: while knowledge is often present in a man, what rules him is not knowledge but rather anything else—sometimes anger, sometimes pleasure, sometimes c pain, at other times love, often fear; they think of his knowledge as being utterly dragged around by all these other things as if it were a slave. Now, does the matter seem like that to you, or does it seem to you that knowledge is a fine thing capable of ruling a person, and if someone were to know what is good and bad, then he would not be forced by anything to act otherwise than knowledge dictates, and intelligence would be sufficient to save a person?"

"Not only does it seem just as you say, Socrates, but further, it would d be shameful indeed for me above all people to say that wisdom and knowledge are anything but the most powerful forces in human activity."

"Right you are. You realize that most people aren't going to be convinced by us. They maintain that most people are unwilling to do what is best, even though they know what it is and are able to do it. And when I have asked them the reason for this, they say that those who act that way do e so because they are overcome by pleasure or pain or are being ruled by one of the things I referred to just now."

"I think people say a lot of other things erroneously too, Socrates."

353 "Come with me, then, and let's try to persuade people and to teach them what is this experience which they call being overcome by pleasure, because of which they fail to do the best thing when they know what it is. For perhaps if we told them that what they were saying isn't true, but is demonstrably false, they would ask us: 'Protagoras and Socrates, if this is not the experience of being overcome by pleasure, but something other than that, what do you two say it is? Tell us.' "

"Socrates, why is it necessary for us to investigate the opinion of ordinary people, who will say whatever occurs to them?"

b "I think this will help us find out about courage, how it is related to the other parts of virtue. If you are willing to go along with what we agreed just now, that I will lead us toward what I think will turn out to be the best way to make things clear, then fine; if you are not willing, I will give it up."

"No, you are right; proceed as you have begun."

c "Going back, then; if they should ask us: 'We have been speaking of "being overcome by pleasure." What do you say this is?' I would reply to them this way: 'Listen. Protagoras and I will try to explain it to you. Do you hold, gentlemen, that this happens to you in circumstances like

these—you are often overcome by pleasant things like food or drink or sex, and you do those things all the while knowing they are ruinous?' They would say yes. Then you and I would ask them again: 'In what sense do you call these things ruinous? Is it that each of them is pleasant in itself d and produces immediate pleasure, or is it that later they bring about diseases and poverty and many other things of that sort? Or even if it doesn't bring about these things later, but gives only enjoyment, would it still be a bad thing, just because it gives enjoyment in whatever way?' Can we suppose then, Protagoras, that they would make any other answer than that bad things are bad not because they bring about immediate pleasure, but rather because of what happens later, disease and things like that?"

"I think that is how most people would answer." e

" 'And in bringing about diseases and poverty, do they bring about pain?' I think they would agree."

"Yes."

" 'Does it not seem to you, my good people, as Protagoras and I maintain, that these things are bad on account of nothing other than the fact that 354 they result in pain and deprive us of other pleasures?' Would they agree?"

Protagoras concurred.

"Then again, suppose we were to ask them the opposite question: 'You who say that some painful things are good, do you not say that such things as athletics and military training and treatments by doctors such as cautery, surgery, medicines, and starvation diet are good things even though painful?' Would they say so?"

"Yes."

" 'Would you call these things good for the reason that they bring about b intense pain and suffering, or because they ultimately bring about health and good condition of bodies and preservation of cities and power over others and wealth?' Would they agree?"

"Yes."

" 'These things are good only because they result in pleasure and in the relief and avoidance of pain? Or do you have some other criterion in view, other than pleasure and pain, on the basis of which you would call these things good?' They say no, I think." c

"And I would agree with you."

" 'So then you pursue pleasure as being good and avoid pain as bad?' "

"Yes."

" 'So this you regard as bad, pain, and pleasure, you regard as good, since you call the very enjoying of something bad whenever it deprives us of greater pleasures than it itself provides, or brings about greater pains d than the very pleasures inherent in it? But if you call the very enjoying of something bad for some other reason and with some other criterion in view than the one I have suggested, you could tell us what it is; but you won't be able to.' "

"I don't think they'll be able to either."

" 'And likewise concerning the actual state of being in pain? Do you call the actual condition of being in pain good, whenever it relieves pains e greater than the ones it contains or brings about greater pleasures than its attendant pains? Now, if you are using some other criterion than the one I have suggested, when you call the very condition of being pained good, you can tell us what it is; but you won't be able to.' "

"Truly spoken."

"Now, again, gentlemen, if you asked me: 'Why are you going on so much about this and in so much detail?' I would reply, forgive me. First of all, it is not easy to show what it is that you call 'being overcome by 355 pleasure,' and then, it is upon this very point that all the arguments rest. But even now it is still possible to withdraw, if you are able to say that the good is anything other than pleasure or that the bad is anything other than pain. Or is it enough for you to live life pleasantly without pain? If it is enough, and you are not able to say anything else than that the good and the bad are that which result in pleasure and pain, listen to this. For I say to you that if this is so, your position will become absurd, when you b say that frequently a man, knowing the bad to be bad, nevertheless does that very thing, when he is able not to do it, having been driven and overwhelmed by pleasure; and again when you say that a man knowing the good is not willing to do it, on account of immediate pleasure, having been overcome by it. Just how absurd this is will become very clear, if we do not use so many names at the same time, 'pleasant' and 'painful,' 'good' and 'bad'; but since these turned out to be only two things, let us instead c call them by two names, first, 'good' and 'bad,' then later, 'pleasant' and 'painful.' On that basis, then, let us say that a man knowing bad things to be bad, does them all the same. If then someone asks us: 'Why?' 'Having been overcome,' we shall reply. 'By what?' he will ask us. We are no longer able to say 'by pleasure,'—for it has taken on its other name, 'the good' instead of 'pleasure'—so we will say and reply that 'he is overcome . . .' 'By what?' he will ask. 'By the good,' we will say, 'for heaven's sake!' If d by chance the questioner is rude he might burst out laughing and say: 'What you're saying is ridiculous—someone does what is bad, knowing that it is bad, when it is not necessary to do it, having been overcome by the good. So,' he will say, 'within yourself, does the good outweigh the bad or not?' We will clearly say in reply that it does not; for if it did, the person who we say is overcome by pleasure would not have made any mistake. 'In virtue of what,' he might say, 'does the good *outweigh* the bad e or the bad the good? Only in that one is greater and one is smaller, or more and less.' We could not help but agree. 'So clearly then' he will say, 'by "being overcome" you mean getting more bad things for the sake of fewer good things.'[19] That settles that, then.

19. The Greek translated "for the sake of" here is *anti*: it might alternatively be translated "in exchange for."

"So let's now go back and apply the names 'the pleasant' and 'the painful' to these very same things. Now let us say that a man does what before we called 'bad' things and now shall call 'painful' ones, knowing they are painful 356
things, but being overcome by pleasant things, although it is clear that they do not outweigh them. But how else does pleasure outweigh pain, except in relative excess or deficiency? Isn't it a matter (to use other terms) of larger and smaller, more or fewer, greater or lesser degree?

"For if someone were to say: 'But Socrates, the immediate pleasure is very much different from the pleasant and the painful at a later time,' I would reply, 'They are not different in any other way than by pleasure b
and pain, for there is no other way that they could differ. Weighing is a good analogy; you put the pleasures together and the pains together, both the near and the remote, on the balance scale, and then say which of the two is more. For if you weigh pleasant things against pleasant, the greater and the more must always be taken; if painful things against painful, the fewer and the smaller. And if you weigh pleasant things against painful, and the painful is exceeded by the pleasant—whether the near by the remote or the remote by the near—you have to perform that action in which the pleasant prevails; on the other hand, if the pleasant is exceeded c
by the painful, you have to refrain from doing that. Does it seem any different to you, my friends?' I know that they would not say otherwise."

Protagoras assented.

"Since this is so, I will say to them: 'Answer me this: Do things of the same size appear to you larger when seen near at hand and smaller when seen from a distance, or not?' They would say they do. 'And similarly for thicknesses and pluralities? And equal sounds seem louder when near at hand, softer when farther away?' They would agree. 'If then our well- d
being depended upon this, doing and choosing large things, avoiding and not doing the small ones, what would we see as our salvation in life? Would it be the art of measurement or the power of appearance? While the power of appearance often makes us wander all over the place in confusion, often changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices with respect to things large and small, the art of measurement in contrast, would make the appearances lose their power e
by showing us the truth, would give us peace of mind firmly rooted in the truth and would save our life.' Therefore, would these men agree, with this in mind, that the art of measurement would save us, or some other art?"

"I agree, the art of measurement would."

"What if our salvation in life depended on our choices of odd and even, when the greater and the lesser had to be counted correctly, either the same kind against itself or one kind against the other, whether it be near or remote? 357
What then would save our life? Surely nothing other than knowledge, specifically some kind of measurement, since that is the art of the greater and the lesser? In fact, nothing other than arithmetic, since it's a question of the odd and even? Would these men agree with us or not?"

Protagoras thought they would agree.

"Well, then, my good people: Since it has turned out that our salvation
b in life depends on the right choice of pleasures and pains, be they more or fewer, greater or lesser, farther or nearer, doesn't our salvation seem, first of all, to be measurement, which is the study of relative excess and deficiency and equality?"

"It must be."

"And since it is measurement, it must definitely be an art, and knowledge."

"They will agree."

"What exactly this art, this knowledge is, we can inquire into later; that it is knowledge of some sort is enough for the demonstration which
c Protagoras and I have to give in order to answer the question you asked us. You asked it, if you remember, when we were agreeing that nothing was stronger or better than knowledge, which always prevails, whenever it is present, over pleasure and everything else. At that point you said that pleasure often rules even the man who knows; since we disagreed, you went on to ask us this: 'Protagoras and Socrates, if this experience is not
d being overcome by pleasure, what is it then; what do you say it is? Tell us.' If immediately we had said to you 'ignorance,' you might have laughed at us, but if you laugh at us now, you will be laughing at yourselves. For you agreed with us that those who make mistakes with regard to the choice of pleasure and pain, in other words, with regard to good and bad, do so because of a lack of knowledge, and not merely a lack of knowledge
e but a lack of that knowledge you agreed was measurement. And the mistaken act done without knowledge you must know is one done from ignorance. So this is what "being overcome by pleasure" is—ignorance in the highest degree, and it is this which Protagoras and Prodicus and Hippias claim to cure. But you, thinking it to be something other than ignorance, do not go to sophists yourselves, nor do you send your children to them for instruction, believing as you do that we are dealing with something unteachable. By worrying about your money and not giving it to them, you all do badly in both private and public life.'

358 "This is how we would have answered the many. Now, I ask you, Hippias and Prodicus, as well as Protagoras—this is your conversation also—to say whether you think what I say is true or false." They all thought that what I said was marvelously true.

"So you agree that the pleasant is good, the painful bad. I beg indulgence of Prodicus who distinguishes among words; for whether you call it 'pleas-
b ant' or 'delightful' or 'enjoyable,' or whatever way or manner you please to name this sort of thing, my excellent Prodicus, please respond to the intent of my question." Prodicus, laughing, agreed, as did the others.

"Well, then, men, what about this? Are not all actions leading toward living painlessly and pleasantly honorable and beneficial? And isn't honorable activity good and beneficial?"

They agreed.

"Then if the pleasant is the good, no one who knows or believes there c
is something else better than what he is doing, something possible, will go on doing what he had been doing when he could be doing what is better. To give in to oneself is nothing other than ignorance, and to control oneself is nothing other than wisdom."

They all agreed.

"Well, then, do you say that ignorance is to have a false belief and to be deceived about matters of importance?"

They all agreed on this.

"Now, no one goes willingly toward the bad or what he believes to be d
bad; neither is it in human nature, so it seems, to want to go toward what one believes to be bad instead of to the good. And when he is forced to choose between one of two bad things, no one will choose the greater if he is able to choose the lesser."

They agreed with all of that too.

"Well, then, is there something you call dread or fear? And I address this to you, Prodicus. I say that whether you call it fear or dread, it is an expectation of something bad."

Protagoras and Hippias thought that this was true of both dread and e
fear, but Prodicus thought it applied to dread, but not to fear.

"Well, it does not really matter, Prodicus. This is the point. If what I have said up to now is true, then would anyone be willing to go toward what he dreads, when he can go toward what he does not? Or is this impossible from what we have agreed? For it was agreed that what one fears one holds to be bad; no one goes toward those things which he holds to be bad, or chooses those things willingly."

They all agreed. 359

"Well, Prodicus and Hippias, with this established, let Protagoras defend for us the truth of his first answer. I don't mean his very first answer, for then he said that while there are five parts of virtue, none is like any other, but each one has its own unique power or function. I'm not talking about this now, but about what he said later. For later he said that four of them b
are very similar to each other, but one differs very much from the others, namely courage. And he said that I would know this by the following evidence: 'You will find, Socrates, many people who are extremely impious, unjust, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous; by this you will recognize that courage differs very much from all the other parts of virtue.' I was very surprised at his answer then, and even more so now that I have gone over these things with you. I asked him then if he said that the courageous were confident. And he said, 'Yes, and ready c
for action too.' Do you remember giving this answer?"

He said he did.

"Well, then, tell us, for what actions are the courageous ready? The same actions as the cowardly?"

"No."

"Different actions?"

"Yes."

"Do the cowardly go forward to things which inspire confidence, and the courageous toward things to be feared?"

"So it is said by most people."

d "Right, but I am not asking that. Rather, what do *you* say the courageous go boldly toward: toward things to be feared, believing them to be fearsome, or toward things not to be feared?"

"By what you have just said, the former is impossible."

"Right again; so, if our demonstration has been correct, then no one goes toward those things he considers to be fearsome, since not to be in control of oneself was found to be ignorance."

He agreed.

e "But all people, both the courageous and the cowardly, go toward that about which they are confident; both the cowardly and the courageous go toward the same things."

"But, Socrates, what the cowardly go toward is completely opposite to what the courageous go toward. For example, the courageous are willing to go to war, but the cowardly are not."

"Is going to war honorable or is it disgraceful?"

"Honorable."

"Then, if it is honorable, we have agreed before, it is also good, for we agreed that all honorable actions were good."

"Very true, and I always believed this."

360 "And rightly; but who would you say are not willing to go to war, war being honorable and good?"

"The cowardly."

"If a thing is noble and good, is it also pleasant?"

"That was definitely agreed upon."

"So, the cowardly, with full knowledge, are not willing to go toward the more honorable, the better, and more pleasant?"

"If we agree to that, we will undermine what we agreed on earlier."

"What about the courageous man: Does he go toward the more honorable, the better, and more pleasant?"

"We must agree to that."

"So, generally, when the courageous fear, their fear is not disgraceful; nor when they are confident is their confidence disgraceful."

b "True."

"If not disgraceful, is it honorable?"

He agreed.

"If honorable, then also good?"

"Yes."

"Whereas the fear and confidence of the cowardly, the foolhardy, and madmen are disgraceful?"

He agreed.

"Is their confidence disgraceful and bad for any reason other than ignorance and stupidity?"

"No, it isn't." c

"Now then; that through which cowardly people are cowardly, do you call it cowardice or courage?"

"Cowardice."

"And aren't cowards shown to be so through their ignorance of what is to be feared?"

"Absolutely."

"So they are cowards because of that ignorance?"

He agreed.

"You agreed that it is through cowardice that they are cowards?"

He said he did.

"So, can we conclude that cowardice is ignorance of what is and is not to be feared?"

He nodded.

"Now, courage is the opposite of cowardice." d

He said yes.

"So then, wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is the opposite of this ignorance?"

He nodded again.

"And this ignorance is cowardice?"

He nodded again, very reluctantly.

"So the wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is courage and is the opposite of this ignorance?"

He would not even nod at this; he remained silent.

And I said, "What's this, Protagoras? Will you not say yes or no to my question?"

"Answer it yourself."

"I have only one more question to ask you. Do you still believe, as you e did at first, that some men are extremely ignorant and yet still very courageous?"

"I think that you just want to win the argument, Socrates, and that is why you are forcing me to answer. So I will gratify you and say that, on the basis of what we have agreed upon, it seems to me to be impossible."

"I have no other reason for asking these things than my desire to answer these questions about virtue, especially what virtue is in itself. For I know 361 that if we could get clear on that, then we would be able to settle the question about which we both have had much to say, I—that virtue cannot be taught, you—that it can.

"It seems to me that our discussion has turned on us, and if it had a voice of its own, it would say, mockingly, 'Socrates and Protagoras, how ridiculous you are, both of you. Socrates, you said earlier that virtue cannot b be taught, but now you are arguing the very opposite and have attempted to show that everything is knowledge—justice, temperance, courage—in

which case, virtue would appear to be eminently teachable. On the other hand, if virtue is anything other than knowledge, as Protagoras has been trying to say, then it would clearly be unteachable. But, if it turns out to be wholly knowledge, as you now urge, Socrates, it would be very surprising indeed if virtue could not be taught. Now, Protagoras maintained at first
c that it could be taught, but now he thinks the opposite, urging that hardly any of the virtues turn out to be knowledge. On that view, virtue could hardly be taught at all.'

"Now, Protagoras, seeing that we have gotten this topsy-turvy and
d terribly confused, I am most eager to clear it all up, and I would like us, having come this far, to continue until we come through to what virtue is in itself, and then to return to inquire about whether it can or cannot be taught, so that Epimetheus might not frustrate us a second time in this inquiry, as he neglected us in the distribution of powers and abilities in your story. I liked the Prometheus character in your story better than Epimetheus. Since I take promethean forethought over my life as a whole, I pay attention to these things, and if you are willing, as I said at the beginning, I would be pleased to investigate them along with you."

e "Socrates, I commend your enthusiasm and the way you find your way through an argument. I really don't think I am a bad man, certainly the last man to harbor ill will. Indeed, I have told many people that I admire you more than anyone I have met, certainly more than anyone in your generation. And I say that I would not be surprised if you gain among men high repute for wisdom. We will examine these things later, whenever you wish; now it is time to turn our attention elsewhere."

362 "That is what we should do, if it seems right to you. It is long since time for me to keep that appointment I mentioned. I stayed only as a favor to our noble colleague Callias."

Our conversation was over, and so we left.